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SUBJECT: THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE PENDING: KOROMA COMMENTS ON HIS FIRST YEAR IN OFFICE

Classified By: CDA GLENN FEDZER FOR REASON 1.4 (b)

¶1. (C) Summary: President Koroma marked the end of his first year in office by inviting government and international officials and members of the media to a speech on the anniversary of his inauguration. His September 18 was broadcast live across the country. The President took credit for, among other achievements, new legislation, better donor relations, and electricity in the capital. His speech fit the mold of Sierra Leonean political discourse, telling the population and international community what it wanted to hear, and blaming his predecessors (not inaccurately...) for many of the problems his administration currently faces. President Koroma is likely sincere in his intent to bring about the positive changes highlighted in his speech, but he has yet to make some of the hard decisions needed to realize that change. End Summary.

¶2. (U) President Koroma marked the end of his first year in office by inviting members of his administration, government officials, parliamentarians, the international community, and media to celebrate the anniversary of his inauguration. Information Minister Ibrahim Kargbo opened the event by emphasizing the government's efforts to rebrand Sierra Leone as a "developing" rather than a "post-conflict" nation, and highlighted the media role in the effort. This re-branding is part of President Koroma's efforts to restore international confidence and foster attitudinal change in Sierra Leone.

¶3. (U) President Koroma then took the floor, listing what he considers his notable achievements in his first year in office:

--The resumption of direct budgetary support from the international community, including 26 million pounds from DFID and \$3 million from the World Bank; direct support was previously frozen due to concerns over transparency

--A government-initiated review of mining agreements to ensure that the people of Sierra Leone benefit proportionately from mining profits

--Visits by high profile individuals, including George Soros and former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, and their pledges to provide technical assistance and advocate on Sierra Leone's behalf

--Improved ranking in the International Finance Corporation's Doing Business Report

--The passage of new legislation, including anti-drug legislation and anti-corruption legislation, both of which are viewed among the best in the sub-region

--The provision of mostly reliable electricity in Freetown, with plans for expansion and improvements next year.

¶4. (U) Despite his satisfaction with these accomplishments,

Koroma warned of challenges still ahead, including the need to manage the long-term effects of the civil war, eliminate poverty, end youth unemployment, and improve access to justice. Preventing terrorism, fighting corruption, and combating global warming were also cited as issues facing the administration in its second year. In naming the challenges, the President did not miss the opportunity to note that many are the legacy of the previous administration.

¶15. (U) President Koroma then turned his focus to issues that need to be on the government's radar. For national growth, investment is needed in information technology, agriculture, tourism, education, infrastructure, and national resource development. The government also needs to promote private and public sector investment and continue to improve the nation's image internationally. Finally, it must build on the democratic gains of the 2007 election process by consolidating peace, rule of law and good governance. Koroma's specific goals include: improving Sierra Leoneans' relationship with the environment; working with the international donor community to ensure aid addresses national priorities; building a national service ethos among Sierra Leoneans; eliminating corrupt and ineffective public officials from government; and, working towards political reconciliation.

¶16. (U) Local media have been divided on the President's performance in his first year. One of the most reputable daily newspapers, Awoko, published the results of an interlan poll that had 17 percent giving the administration and "A," 25 percent a "B," 20 percent a "C," and 38 percent a "D."

¶17. (C) Comment: Koroma's remarks, effectively a state of the union address, contained few surprises and offered few solutions for political observers. Two noteworthy aspects were the limited discussion on narcotics trafficking, especially in light of the current inertia surrounding the most recent drug bust (due in large part to the inexplicable absence of the Attorney General from Sierra Leone for much of September), and the new focus on the environment, which has never been part of his platform and had previously received very little attention. Otherwise, his comments maintained the norm in Sierra Leonean political rhetoric: emphasis on topics of interest to the international community, such as terrorism and corruption; identification of challenges but no concrete solutions; and voicing support for political tolerance while also pointing the finger at rivals. That said, Koroma is still viewed as sincere in his efforts, but has yet to make the hard decisions needed, including dismissing ineffective and/or corrupt ministers, before his stated vision can begin to be realized. End Comment.

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